

**NINETY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the STATE OF MISSOURI  
SECOND REGULAR SESSION**

**FIRST DAY, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2016**

**ADDRESS BY SPEAKER TODD RICHARDSON**

Friends and colleagues, it is an honor to stand before you this afternoon as the speaker of the people's House.

Let me start by saying that each of us has the opportunity to serve here because we have people who have helped make it possible. I hope you will indulge me the opportunity to say thank you to the people - without which I would not be here today.

First, my parents - Mark and Kathy - are here today. My entire life they have been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration. Predictably my mother is crying right now - so please help her by making them feel welcome.

My son Sawyer is here - he is also representing his sister Briley. Sawyer and Briley are constant reminders to me that - while our work is important - the most important moments in life don't happen in this building. Sawyer asked me to tell all of you that he is AWESOME and I ask that you all make him feel welcome today.

Most importantly - my wife Amber is here. I am a better person because of her. She challenges me - she keeps me grounded - and has been a rock of support. Because none of you want to be on her bad side - please also make her feel welcome today.

As we begin another legislative session we do so at a difficult time for many in our state. In just the last few weeks we have seen flooding devastate so many parts of Missouri. I know so many of you have spent countless hours working with the people of your district to coordinate flood relief efforts. Our hearts and our prayers go out to the families and friends of those who were lost to the flooding, and to the many families who were displaced from their homes by the rising waters.

The job we do involves far more than making laws... It is a commitment and a duty to the people we serve to do all we can to help them during times of prosperity as well as times of need. Whether that's the work we do in the halls of government or rolling up our sleeves and helping volunteers to sandbag... our vow is to provide the help and the resources necessary to allow Missourians to persevere even during the most difficult times.

The events of the last few weeks are a reminder that we convene here at a time when serious challenges face this state. This is of course nothing new. Before addressing you, I actually took the time to watch the last seven opening day speeches from this house.

YouTube is a wonderful thing. All of those speeches predictably included some derivation of “serious challenges face this state.”

They didn’t have YouTube when the first session of this General Assembly convened in 1822, but I’m confident that our first speaker - the gentleman from Ste. Genevieve - likely invoked the same sort of sentiment.

In fact, I’m confident that for the last 195 years, the man or woman in my position who has taken this dais on this day has said similar things.

And they were right every time. We do face serious challenges - and as we’ve done in the past we will rise to meet them. But before we get to work on the challenges facing this state, I want to talk about what it means to serve in this House.

Americans have always been skeptical of people who do what we do - people who have the combination of guts, work ethic, and yes, at least a little bit of ego, people who are willing to put their name on a ballot and stand for election. Missourians in particular may be even more skeptical. This is the home of Mark Twain, who reminded us that no man’s life, liberty, or property is safe while the legislature is in session.

But our greatest leaders have not been those who have appealed to our fear or skepticism. They have been those who recognize our greatness. Both Republicans and Democrats have succeeded not by promising us the outcome, but by guaranteeing us the opportunity. From President Reagan to President Kennedy, they challenged us to recognize our potential and strive, each and every day, to use our skills to make our communities, our families, and ourselves better.

For more than 25 of you this will be your last opening day and your final opportunity as state representatives to make our state a better place. On my first day here, the Gentleman from Howell-at the start of his last term-told me: You will be shocked by how fast your time to serve here goes.

I am sure for those of you - who in a few short months will move on to other endeavors - that statement rings particularly true.

For three of you this will be your first session. I still remember the feeling of walking onto the floor of this house - in this magnificent chamber - for the first time. I hope the three of you will take a moment today to appreciate what you have accomplished but also to take stock of the challenge that is in front of you.

Most importantly - I hope that every member of this body remembers that the person they were before they were elected. Before your IQ grew by 40 points and your jokes got a whole lot funnier.

For the three of you who are new, you may have noticed that I have not referred to any current or previous member by their name. We don’t do that here.

It's one of the subtle yet important daily reminders we have of why we are here.

When you take to this floor, you are not here as an individual.

We hold these offices in a public trust. They are not ours. They are the people's.

We do not serve for our own self-promotion or glory - but as the voices AND representatives of the people who sent us here.

For nearly 200 years, men and women have convened in this legislature in early January to embark on a four-month journey to make our state a better place.

I don't want anybody to lose sight of the tremendous honor it is to serve here and in a system of government that is infinitely greater than ourselves.

This body is bigger than us - individually and collectively. It existed for centuries before we were here. God-willing, it will exist for centuries after we are gone.

In keeping with the sentiment, as individuals we must be at our best and as an institution we must be better.

It is no secret that the legislature has had some challenging times over the last year. And there are certainly lessons to be learned from tragedy and scandal - just as there are from triumph and success. Whether we want it to be or not, we are serving in the General Assembly during a time that will define this body for a generation.

I don't get in my car on Monday mornings and drive to Jefferson City to serve in a gridlocked legislature embroiled in controversy. Like each of you I ran for office because I believed that in this House you could help make Missouri a better place to live work and raise a family.

This institution should not and will not be defined by the actions of a few. Together we will work to make this a place where all of you are proud to do the people's work and are proud of our accomplishments when you go home on Thursdays. That task starts immediately.

Tomorrow, on the first day that bills can be referred, I will refer every ethics bill that has been filed to the Committee on Government Oversight and Accountability. I am asking that committee to act with haste to send us a set of substantive - meaningful - single subject ethics bills so that they may be the very first matter that this general assembly tackles. In doing so we will improve the environment in Jefferson City - and begin the process of restoring the public's confidence in this institution. There is no rule or law that can make our imperfect process perfect. We can, and we must, work to improve the culture here in the people's capitol.

The surest way to improve the environment in this capitol and restore the public's trust in this institution is to focus on the job we were sent here to do. When we are at our best this general assembly has demonstrated the ability to do remarkable things to make our state a better place.

This isn't Washington. We do more than talk about problems. We actually get things done here.

Because of the work of people in this body we are on a path to ending the insidious practice of taxation by citation in our municipal court system.

Because of the work of this body taxpayers will get the first income tax cut in 100 years. Relief that will allow people to keep more of what they earn and spur economic growth.

Because of the work of this body we have started the process of transforming our welfare programs - into programs that actually focus on trying to get people out of poverty rather than trap them in it.

And because of the work of this body - there are 30% fewer abortions each year than there were just a decade ago.

But our impact isn't always found in those things that command headlines. Often this body's best work is found in the unheralded efforts to identify a problem and fix it.

Members of this body of all partisan and ideological backgrounds have come together to craft solutions to problems that fit no political category.

Look at the bipartisan work we have done to give Missourians with terminal illnesses access to potentially lifesaving medications...

...or to make oral chemotherapy medications more affordable for Missourians battling cancer.

We have also worked together to ensure any Missourian with an eating disorder has access to the help and they care they need to live a healthy, productive life.

And we have taken proactive steps to protect children from the ever-growing dangers of human trafficking. By doing so, we've made our state a better, more compassionate place.

Missourians from all regions, of all races, and all economic backgrounds too often feel as if the levers of government are rigged against them. Every member receives countless calls from constituents encountering difficulties that demand our attention. And when we address constituent issues successfully, we are improving the lives and livelihoods of Missourians in ways that often surpass the work done in this Chamber.

Despite the good work we've done - there is more to do.

We live in a state where wages are stagnant. Consider this; the spending power of a Missouri family is \$5,000 LESS than it was at the start of this century.

We live in a state where a devastating cycle of dependency traps too many of our fellow Missourians in poverty.

More people are on government assistance than ever before. Spending on welfare and entitlement programs is growing at a rate faster than our economy.

Medicaid expenditures have risen by more than 33% over the last seven years. And over that same period the state's General revenue has grown by less than 4%.

We live in a state and at a time where people are legitimately concerned about the most fundamental of rights. They are concerned that the basic right to religious liberty is in jeopardy. They are concerned about the safety and security of their families. They are concerned about a federal government that seems all too willing to ignore the constitution.

Most troubling is the fact we live in a state where people in many communities - both rural and urban - feel trapped.

They feel trapped in a community that isn't safe - in a community that doesn't afford good education opportunities for their children. They feel trapped in a community where the promise of the American Dream is something people have long since forgotten.

These and other problems cannot be ignored. We must - as this body has done for 200 years - find answers to the seminal challenges of our time and make tough decisions.

Ultimately, the solutions to these problems will not be mine - rather they will be ours. We have the collective ability to solve the problems that now confront us. If we do not believe we are capable of it surely no one else will.

This House cannot be a place where inaction, infighting and indifference define us. This must be a place where we tackle and solve real problems. To be sure - there are many outside of this building who do not believe that is possible. The 35,000 people who each of us represent - expect us to. For the most part, our constituents don't care one bit about who gets the credit for the good stuff that happens and who gets the blame for the bad.

What they do care about is how did we use our time here? Did we use our time and the unique power we all hold - to make this state a better place and to be an advocate for those who sent us here. The answer to that question is the one that will define us.

Thank you - God bless you - and God bless the state of Missouri